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ABSTRACT

Findings of a study that examined the role of the governing body in the independent school's self-renewing processes are presented in this paper. From the holistic paradigm, the school is viewed as a self-renewing system that is able to maintain its identity despite environmental changes through existing structures that define and create expectations. The school is a living system whose primary concern is to maintain its identity. The sample included five schools in the Sydney Anglican Diocese whose heads belonged to the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia. Methodology involved participant observation, interviews with 56 heads and members of governing bodies, and document analysis. Findings indicate that the governing body participates in the mechanisms that stabilize structures of expectations temporally, sociopolitically, and materially. A conclusion is that a school's identity cannot be imposed externally and that administrators must recognize their schools' internal processes, viewing the school as an autonomous, living system. Two figures are included. (Contains 20 references.) (LMI)

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INDEPENDENT SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

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It is almost taken-for-granted that an independent school will have a governing body. This is especially so for schools in the Anglican and protestant traditions. It is also the case for an increasing number of Catholic schools as well (see Wheelan, 1987). But what does such a governing body do? What is the nature of its participation in the life of its school? Does it make any real difference to its school, or is its existence merely factitious? It is questions like these that prompted the writer to undertake the research into independent school governance described in this article (Beavis, 1992).

1. THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In recent years, many of the assumptions that have traditionally guided research into the governance of organizations have come under contention. In particular, chaos theory has challenged the validity of a reductionist, mechanistic approach to complex dynamic systems, and the notion that such systems can be understood by analysing them in terms of fundamental parts has had to be questioned. The new science of living systems has also developed over this period, and although developed in the biological sciences, its insights have been broadened to embrace general systems theory, including social systems (such as schools). This new thinking in the natural sciences challenges assumptions about the control, management and governance of systems. While not all scholars accept that the concepts of living systems are applicable in the social domain (for example, Hejl, 1984), others, such as the German Professor of Sociology at Bielefeld University, Niklas Luhmann, see their acceptance as of major importance in that they shift the emphasis of systems theory from *external control* to *autonomy* (Luhmann, 1983).

As researchers in education and other fields (for example, Dermer, 1988; Ikin, 1989) were recognizing that autonomous behaviour within institutions could not always be satisfactorily explained in terms of the failure of managerial control, a conceptual framework was selected for this study which drew upon these new ideas in the hope that new insights could be gained into the governance of independent schools. In broad terms, schools are viewed as autopoietic[1] (living) systems. At their concrete level of description they may be seen as the particular people who comprise the school at any time; and this will include the pupils, the teachers, the ancillary staff, possibly even the parents. But schools are something more than just these particular people. They are the interactions of those people and the system of communication that emerges from their interactions and that constitute them as "meaningfully aggregated individuals" (Dachler, 1984:141). Such communications are by nature abstract and

[1] A discussion of the theory of autopoiesis is beyond the scope of this article. In brief, however, autopoietic systems are characterised by their ability to maintain their identity in spite of their openness to their environments. In their organizational patterns of relationships, however, they are self-referentially closed systems.

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require description in abstract rather than concrete terms. And these two levels of description, the concrete and the abstract, are both necessary to describe the whole. Computers provide a helpful analogy for this holistic description in their hardware and solftware levels of description. A computer system is more than just its hardware (the concrete level) and more than just its software (the abstract level): it is *both* with the causal links between the two being taken-for-granted and not requiring explication (Davies, 1984:86).

The problem for the school-as-living system, is how to maintain its identity -- how to remain recognizably the same (or almost the same). At the concrete level, schools are constantly changing with personnel coming and going almost continually (Cohen and March, 1974), so their physical features must be changing. But this is no different from a living biological organism where chemicals are constantly being replaced, and physical appearances constantly changing with the ageing process. The more important consideration is that the identity is maintained at the abstract level: that the communication system (which reflects the school's organizational patterns of relationships) remains identifiably distinct from the communications of the environment. This means that meaningful communications within the school are distinguishable from those of the environment.

2. HOW THE SCHOOL MAINTAINS ITS IDENTITY

So how does the school maintain its distinction from the environment in spite of the comings and goings of its personnel? This is achieved by expectations which *the system itself produces and reproduces* within its communications and which guide those on-going communications. These expectations are not necessarily, or even usually, defined or made explicit in any specific way; rather, they are evoked by various contexts. Within the school, only certain choices become stabilized and expected, and these expectations will guide the choices that are subsequently communicated within the school. Social systems, however, are composed of people who are interacting and who are free to make their own choices. Thus when ego and alter are interacting, ego cannot expect alter to respond according to *ego's* expectation of alter's response: alter is not ego's puppet. Ego can only expect alter to respond according to how *alter expects* to respond. Thus ego must expect alter's *expectation* rather than his or her action, and it is this *expectation of expectation* that must structure the interactions of the school's personnel.

If identity is to be maintained, then these structures of expectations of expectations must be kept stable over what have been identified as the three dimensions of social life -- the temporal (the when), the socio-political (the who), and the material[2] (the what) (see Luhmann, 1985). This means that within the school, no matter when choices are being made, who is making them, and whatever their material content, it will be these stabilized expectations of expectations that will be guiding the choosing.

2.1. The Temporal Dimension

Disappointment and surprise are threats to the temporal stability of expectations. When the expectations of expectations which structure the daily life of a school are disappointed by the choice of a member of the school population, that is, when the choice is communicated and presents itself unexpectedly, then the future stability of the expectation is threatened: Was the disappointment merely a slip on the well-trodden path (the expected expectations), or is the path itself no longer viable? In other words: Can the disappointed expectations of expectations continue to be held? Or do new expectations of expectations which have a greater probability of

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[2] The use of the term "material" is, in some respects, unfortunate in that it is not to be confused with its use with respect to a reductionist (or materialist) philosophy. In this context it relates to the material of interaction or the subject of interaction, that is, in the sense of what is materially relevant.

being disappointment-free, have to be learnt? If the school is to maintain its identity in the future, then disappointment must be dealt with.

There are two ways in which disappointment is handled -- expectations can be adapted to correspond to the disappointing reality, that is, learning can take place and such expectation is said to be held cognitively. Or expectations can continue to be held contrary to the facts as they present themselves, but an explanation must be made to account for the disappointing reality. Such expectation is said to be held normatively.

Many of the expectations that structure a school's daily life, are of the latter kind, and must be maintained in spite of any disappointment. This means that mechanisms must be available which will enable disappointment to be dealt with so that the disappointed expectations can be preserved for the future. Within the school's "culture" there are a number of devices that enable disappointment to be handled. It can be explained away in terms of some myth (or saving story, or stereotype) -- the pupil failed to learn mathematics because she was a girl; it can be dealt with by some ritual (or ceremony) -- the teacher was "carpeted", or redress can be taken by means of some sanction -- the pupil was suspended. By such means, the disappointment is shown for what it is, and the disappointed expectation of expectation can continue to be held.

2.2. The Socio-Political Dimension

The structures of expectations of expectations are stabilized among the school population, in spite of the conflicting expectations of its various interest groups, by means of institutionalization. Within this particular framework, institutionalization has a quite specific meaning and expectations are institutionalized when they are the expectations presumed to be held by unidentifiable third parties within the system, that is, when there is a presumption of consensus concerning those expectations -- these are the expectations that "everyone" (whoever the unidentifiable "everyone" may be) agrees upon.

To maintain the presumption of consensus, the agreed upon expectations need to be communicated among the school. Language is one means of communication, but in situations of increased complexity, there are other more generalized means of communication which have greater chances of success in ensuring that more complex communications are received. Among a social group, and especially one that is essentially political in nature, *power* is such a generalized medium of communication. So power will be used to maintain the presumption of consensus. The head of a school is a power-holder, and he or she has a number of power sources available to heighten the probability of successfully communicating the presumed consensus. For example, the head's formal position as representing the employer is empowering when communicating with staff.

Further, within a school there are people and groups who make decisions, who set policies, and make plans which are binding upon the school. Such policies, plans and decisions require *legitimacy* and this is achieved by the use of two complementary processes -- symbolically generalized physical force by which the power-holder is able to ensure that decisions, plans, and policies are accepted; and the participation in institutionalized procedures which prevent the symbolically generalized physical force from being used tyrannically. The position of the school council as the super-ordinate unit at the top of the hierarchy endows it with symbolically generalized superior physical force, but its formal meeting procedures, requiring a quorum and matters to be dealt with on a formal agenda, guarantee that such force cannot be used arbitrarily.

2.3. The Material Dimension

In the material dimension, these generally accepted, and relatively disappointment-free expectations can be securely stored within various factual meaning contexts within the school -- within its people, the roles they play, the programs they follow and the values they

espouse. In this way they are stabilized at varying levels of abstraction and with varying levels of security within the material dimension.

At the most concrete level (and the least secure level) expectations are identified and stored in persons. Obviously, this method of identifying and storing expectations is more suited to small, intimate situations, or where the person is very visible. The charismatic heads of the past were the store-houses for their schools' expectations. Identification and storage in persons involves high risk, however, in that a person can change or disappoint in some particular, and all the expectations stored in that person becomes threatened.

At the next level of abstraction, expectations are identified and stored in roles which are really limited bundles of expectations not attached to particular people but are assumed by various and changeable role performers. This is more general in that the expectations are stored in the role itself and not in the person performing it; however, the latter still represents a risk to their security.

Programs are verbally fixed rules which define correct action. Not being attached to particular persons or particular roles, there is a greater level of abstraction, and a greater level of security. As complexity increases, so schools are storing more and more expectations in verbally fixed forms -- in handbooks, in aims and philosophies documents, in memoranda, in curriculum documents *etc*, all of which are programs of one sort or another.

Values are the most abstract level at which expectations are identified and stored. It is the most secure level as values are not subject to the whims of a person, or the different ways a role can be performed by differing people, or even to changes made in a program. Their abstraction, however, makes them difficult to identify in the first place, and their generality leaves open many possible actions. For example, schools value learning, but that still leaves open the types of actions which will advance learning.

While these four contexts for the identification and storage of expectations are differentiable, in the normal course of events one does not consciously determine from which context an expectation of expectation is being accessed. Further, the various levels presuppose and determine one another reciprocally: roles presume that there are people to perform them; and people are relieved of individual responsibility by performing roles, for example.

3. THE RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGY

A school is conceptualised here then, as first and foremost, a self-renewing system. Despite changes of staff, students, parents, and members of its governing body (its units at the concrete level of description) and changes in its environment to which it is necessarily open, a school can maintain its identity. The school is able to maintain its identity because, in spite of these changes, there are structures of expectation which govern the choices the school makes and these structures remain stable. The school is self-referential: it can refer to these structures of expectation and make satisfactory (meaningful) choices assuring its self-renewal. The particular focus of the research being described, is the governing body and its participation in the processes which ensure the continuation of the identity of an independent school; that is, the participation of the governing body in the self-renewing processes. The major question to guide the research was therefore:

* *What part (if any) does the governing body of an independent school play in the self-renewing processes which guarantee the continuity of the school's identity?*

A case study methodology was selected to conduct this research. This was justified on the grounds that (i) such a method had successfully been use in other studies related to governing bodies, (ii) its utility to the single researcher with limited resources, (iii) its congruence with the holistic nature of the conceptual framework, and (iv) the congruence between the epistemological assumptions of the research problem and knowledge produced by

case studies. Five particular schools with relatively easy access to the researcher, were selected for study. These schools were all schools in the Sydney Anglican Diocese whose heads belong to the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (A.H.I.S.A.). They were Meriden School for Girls (Strathfield), St Andrew's Cathedral School (Sydney) (S.A.C.S.), St Catherine's School for Girls (Waverley), Trinity Grammar School (Summer Hill), and The Illawarra Grammar School (Wollongong) (T.I.G.S.). These schools were selected to reflect a range of schools within the Diocese of Sydney and within A.H.I.S.A.. Two of the schools are girls' schools (St Catherine's and Meriden), two are boys' schools (St Andrew's and Trinity) and one is co-educational (T.I.G.S.). Three of the schools have governing bodies which are largely appointed by the Synod of the Diocese (St Catherine's, Trinity and T.I.G.S.), one has its governing body appointed by the chapter of the cathedral church of the diocese (St Andrew's), and one is an independent Anglican body which largely appoints its own membership (Meriden). To this extent, there is the potential for the results of the investigation to be generalized to Anglican schools within the Sydney Diocese and, more widely, to other independent schools within A.H.I.S.A.. Three techniques were used to collect data -- participant-observation, interviews, and document analysis. Participant-observation was justified on the grounds that *de facto* that is the writer's role in two of the schools in that he is the head of S.A.C.S. and a member of the council of St Catherine's; interviews on the grounds that the data required has inherent conceptual difficulties; and document analysis on the grounds that documents (including available minutes that record a council's actions) would provide data in the material dimension.

Fifty-six research interviews with heads and members of governing bodies were conducted during the early part of 1991. Of these, fifty-five were recorded and transcribed. The minutes of one of the school's councils for a five year period, together with other relevant documents from all of the schools, were reviewed.

The problems of generalizing the findings of case studies was considered, and particularly the problem of generalizing from instance to class. There are two grounds for believing that some degree of generalization is valid in this research. The first was the consistency of the findings among the cases themselves. Where there are differences, these were easily explained.

The second was the correlation between the social profiles of the members of the governing bodies of these schools and those of the A.H.I.S.A. schools in New South Wales (N.S.W.) with similar governance. In the latter part of 1990, a survey was conducted of the members of the governing bodies of protestant A.H.I.S.A. schools in N.S.W. and a social profile of the respondents was developed (Beavis, 1991). The responses from the case schools were extracted and, because of the small numbers in each case, combined into one sample with a population size of fifty-three. This was then compared with the total population (population size of two hundred and eighty-six).

While no statistical tests were applied, a simple comparison of the results shows that the correlation between the the social profile of the people serving on the councils of the case schools and that of those serving on similar schools throughout N.S.W., is very high in a number of key factors. Where there were differences, they were explicable and, in any case, are of little consequence in terms of the focus of the research. The conclusion was that the selected group of governing body members was fairly typical of the the whole population of governing body members of similarly governed schools so that generalization to that class of schools has some validity.

4. THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1. The Temporal Dimension

The research revealed that the governing bodies of the independent schools investigated do not expect to participate directly in the handling of disappointed expectations -- they expect that disappointments will be dealt with, but they entrust that function to their

heads: the councils expect to give the heads their support. The only time the evidence suggests this is not the case, is when the disappointing behaviour is that of the head him- or herself. In that case it was found that a council would be prepared to take direct action and 'sanction' the head, and in the short term, even institutionalize new procedures surrounding the head's participation in the school.

Governing bodies differentiate expectations and hold some expectations cognitively while others are generalized as norms. Cognitive expectations were especially seen in areas where there is turbulence in the environment such as in industrial matters with staff, and dress regulations with pupils. In these areas the governing bodies were found to adapt their expectations to ensure that they have a greater probability of being disappointment-free in the future.

In the case of disappointment of normative expectations, the governing bodies were found to employ various myths, rituals, sanctions and policies to deal with their disappointment. The participation of the governing bodies in the development of the various myths, rituals and sanctions within their schools' cultures in the first place, however, was not investigated. They also used policy stories to assuage disappointment. The policies that were used, while not necessarily originating within the governing bodies, were at least regarded as having their approval, and therefore seen as the councils' policies.

4.2. The Socio-Political Dimension

4.2.1. Sustaining the Presumption of Consensus

The governing bodies were found to display a strong desire to maintain a presumption of consensus within themselves. They achieve this by discussing issues to the point where a vote becomes a mere formality so that contrary votes are very rare. Where this cannot be achieved, and time is available, they defer contentious matters until a compromise emerges and major opposition is withdrawn.

Further, the governing bodies were found to use power to communicate the presumption of consensus. Such power is generalized (that is, not specific in any way) and symbolic (that is, not put to the test) and available in a number of sources. First the governing bodies possess power as a consequence of their constitutions -- they derive from these the ability to deliver ultimate sanctions, and those to whom communication is directed want to avoid such sanctioning. Second, they use the power of the role of their heads to communicate with their schools -- the heads (who are power-holders within their schools) are generally the governing bodies' channels of communication. Third, they use the power of the role of their chairmen (who are also seen as power-holders within their schools) for certain communications within their schools. Fourth, they use the power of group dynamics and strong personalities to communicate the presumption of consensus within their own ranks. Fifth, the skills and expert knowledge of a governing body's membership is a source of power for it to communicate within its school. On the other hand, however, the governing bodies' lack of knowledge of school affairs empowers their heads in communicating with them. Sixth, the formal meeting procedures of the governing bodies (including control over their agendas, and minutes) are sources of power used to maintain the presumption of consensus within the governing bodies and to communicate this consensus to their schools. Seventh, the governing bodies control their schools' assets and finances, and this gives them sanctioning power which they use to sustain the presumption of consensus -- they can withhold funds from programs which may disturb the consensus and they can deliver funds to programs that sustain their expectations of expectations. Eighth, the governing bodies use the power of their policies to sustain the presumption of consensus.

The governing bodies expect that any dissent in their schools will be handled by their heads. When a contentious issue disturbs a school community deeply, however, or it

concerns matters of the governing body's policies, then the governing body sees its role as becoming directly involved, first by investigating the issues involved and either confirming or changing its current policy, and then communicating the presumed consensus by means of the power of its chairman or some other delegated member.

4.2.2. Legitimacy

At all of the schools investigated, their governing bodies made decisions, formulated aims, and set policies that identified their binding expectations of the expectations of their schools. They do this on the basis of the authority vested in them in their constituting documents. Further, all of the governing bodies make plans for their schools. It was found, however, that in their normal functioning, the decisions, plans and policies which councils make, are seldom initiated by them, but rather from within other parts of their schools. The governing bodies most important role is to institutionalize the expectations of expectations expressed in these policies, plans and decisions by confirming them so that the expected presumptions of consensus within the schools are those of the governing bodies.

It was found that the governing bodies in each of the cases used the two complementary mechanisms of symbolically generalized physical force and participation in institutionalized procedures to legitimise their plans, policies and decisions. Their superior force is guaranteed by their positions as super-ordinate units which constitutionally they occupy, and by their compliance with the norms of their institutional environments. This force is moderated by the institutionalized meeting and boundary procedures in which the governing bodies are found to participate.

4.3. The Material Dimension

There can be no doubt that the expectations of expectations which guide the choices these schools make are identified, stored, and made accessible through the persons in the schools (including the members of the governing bodies and their language), the roles they perform, the programs to be followed and the values that are expressed.

4.3.1. Persons

The governing bodies are found generally only to make one appointment in their own right, and that is the appointment of the head. In that person, however, they look to personify their schools' expectations of expectations, and the heads' expectations and the councils' expectations are often spoken of synonymously. The councils take their responsibilities for these appointments very seriously and generally regard the function of appointing the head as one of their prime functions. With some minor variations, the governing bodies also participate in the selection processes for senior appointments such as deputies, business managers and development officers. The appointment of other staff is the responsibility of the heads.

The selection of persons to serve on the governing bodies, is found to vary from school to school and is dependent upon a school's constitution. Nevertheless, even in the schools where the bulk of the membership is appointed externally, the governing bodies are found to influence the nominations to the appointing bodies and thus have some influence in the selection of their own members. In this they ensure that they identify the expectations of expectations stored in their own membership.

4.3.1.1. Language

Language is important in this context and the language that is used within the school is also a means of identifying and storing expectations at this concrete level. Particular vocabularies, and especially particular metaphors, become institutionalized and identify and store expectations at this concrete level.

The metaphors identified in this study were of particular interest. They were able to be grouped within four broad categories. The first group stores the expectation that councils expect their schools to expect them to preserve the *status quo* and to dampen disturbances -- the boat is not to be rocked, fires are to be extinguished, problems are to be kept under wraps. The second stores the expectation that councils expect to be seen as fully involved in the lives of their schools -- councillors are not "faceless men and women". The third group stores the expectation that councils expect to be seen as possessing real power -- they are not rubber stamps or lame ducks, or comfortable clubs, but rather ankle-biters. The final group stores the expectation that councils expect their schools to produce tangible (perhaps even measurable) products -- the councils are the "boards of directors" of "companies" in the "market place". This latter group of metaphors seems particularly significant in terms of guiding the choices of whom to appoint as staff and the councils no doubt expect their heads to expect to appoint staff who can produce "tangible" results.

4.3.2. Roles

The governing bodies have limited participation in the creation of roles within their schools -- they create the role of head and they have direct involvement in roles such as director of development and business manager (bursar). Because of their limited contact with other roles in the schools, the governing bodies have little opportunity to identify and store expectations in those roles. What they are found to do, however, is to institutionalize these other roles by approving their creation and the programs which sustain them. In the development of their own roles, the governing bodies are found to be identifying and storing certain expectations -- such as to be responsible for their schools' aims and basic philosophies, policies and finances, the selection and sanctioning of their heads, and above all, to institutionalize their schools' institutions.

4.3.3. Programs

The governing bodies' participation in the development of programs which identify and store expectation, while again being limited, is greater than at the level of role. Here again, they are found to be the institutionalizers of programs (including policies) developed elsewhere. The governing bodies, however, are found to intervene in the development of programs and to use their power of veto. Further, they are found, in some cases, to be directly involved in the writing of programs, especially as expressed in aims, philosophies, policies and prospectuses.

4.3.4. Values

Council members perceive that their schools express their values in, what for convenience, may be categorized in three broad ways -- in artifacts, in processes and in verbal statements. A number of the schools' values are expressed in artifacts, including buildings, uniforms, badges and mottos, school prayers and hymns, prizes and trophies, and the governing bodies take active roles in their maintenance and the "images" they project. With values expressed in processes, the governing bodies express tangible support by way of congratulations and appreciation when they recognise actions that express those values. Heads and chairmen verbally express values either in spoken or written form on a number of occasions in the lives of their schools and again it is found that the governing bodies participate in these by their presence (especially at speech day ceremonies) and tacit support.

4.4. Reflexive Functioning

The general conclusion is that the governing body of an independent school plays a considerable part in the specifics of the self-renewing processes which guarantee the continuity of the school's identity. But its participation is found to go deeper than the specifics, to one that is essential if the school is to function effectively in the face of the complexity and contingency of society. For the research reveals that the governing body allows the mechanisms which guarantee the stability of the structures of expectations of expectations which guide the

school's choices and ensure its self-renewal, *to function at the reflexive level* -- the more effective level in the face of complexity and contingency.

The notion of reflexivity simply means applying something to itself before applying it to its proper function, and the reason for doing this is to heighten its effectiveness. By way of illustration, in simple societies, or in situations of relatively low complexity and contingency, teaching can take place as problems arise and need to be solved -- "on the job" as it were. When complexity and contingency increase, however, teaching is guaranteed greater effectiveness if it functions at the reflexive level, that is, if we first "teach teaching before teaching the children" (Luhmann, 1976:524). Now this rule of reflexivity applies generally, according to Luhmann (1985:164-165), so that in situations of increased complexity and contingency, something always functions more effectively as a means of reducing the complexity and contingency (without eliminating their increased richness), if it has first been applied to itself, that is, if it is available at the reflexive level.

It is the claim of this research that the governing body of an independent school is an adaptation which enables the school's self-renewing processes to function at the reflexive level -- it sanctions the sanctions in the temporal dimension, it institutionalizes the institutions in the socio-political dimension, and it makes accessible the means of making accessible expectations in the material dimension.

FIGURE 1: **SIMPLE INSTITUTIONALIZATION**

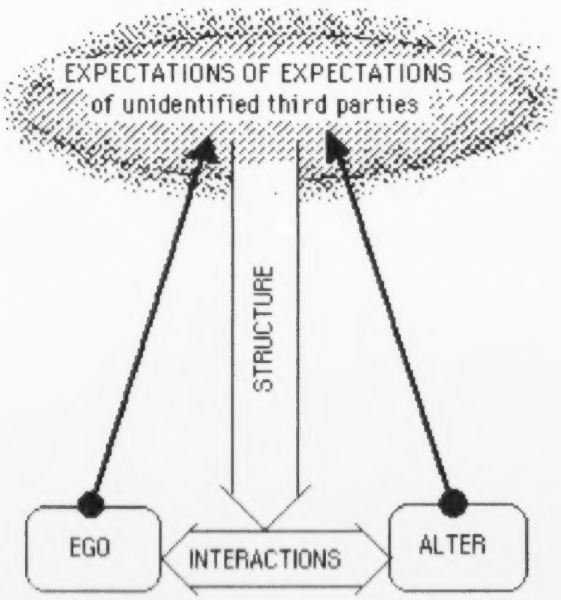

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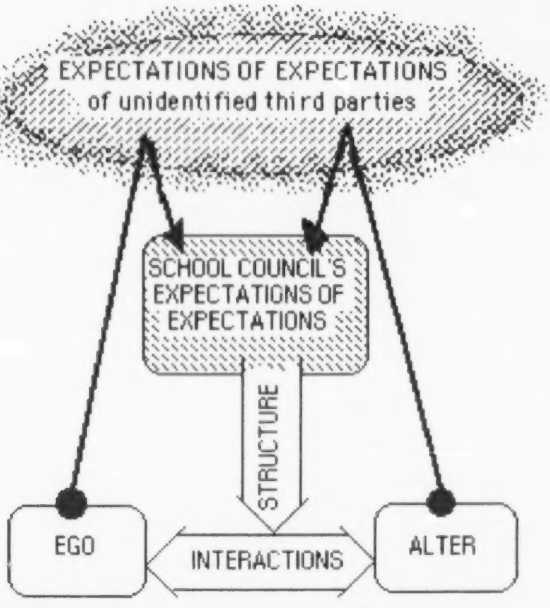
FIGURE 2: **REFLEXIVE INSTITUTIONALIZATION**



The major conclusion drawn from this study may be stated as follows:

The governing body of an independent school is not merely an adornment, an additional but non-essential participant: it has the function of raising the functioning of the school's self-renewing mechanisms to the reflexive level -- the more effective level to cope with the complexity and contingency of contemporary society.

Its participation in the life of the school is not merely factitious, but essential in the face of complexity and contingency.

4.5. The Conceptual Framework Revisited

The research project described in this paper explored relatively new ground in both the theory and practice of educational administration. The conceptual framework developed therein has not been used in other studies in this field (as far as the writer can determine), indeed the concepts it employs have only recently been introduced into the field by Sungaila (1988(a); 1988(b); 1989(a); 1989(b); 1990) and to a lesser extent by Hills and Gibson (1990). The significance of this framework is that it offers an alternative way of attending to schools (independent or state-run) -- a way that does not focus upon the parts, but upon the whole -- a way that recognises autonomy and how that can be understood and directed, rather than how to attempt to control an uncontrollable future. As stated above, the phenomenon of the autonomous behaviour of organizations is now being seen by scholars as something other than an organizational pathology. Given this to be the case, then a theoretical framework that accounts for that autonomy, indeed that sees it as the motivating purpose of any social system, must have something to contribute to the theory of educational administration.

The purpose of this study, however, was not to investigate the theoretical framework *per se*: it was assumed to be a valid way of attending to the particular reality. The fact that it has been able to offer an explanation of the participation of the governing body in the life of an independent school suggests its usefulness to the field of educational administration.

The implications of this theory for the practitioner are enormous. Without an understanding of the processes that a school uses to maintain its identity, any agent who may wish to change that identity will either blindly (or perhaps intuitively) stumble upon the correct actions to take, or be doomed to frustration and failure as he or she attempts to overcome the school's inherent propensity to remain the same (its autopoiesis). Adaptation and change is possible, but the agent who wishes to implement same must first know the internal processes that are maintaining the school and how these may be overcome (and be aware of the risks involved in attempting to disturb them); and the processes by which the school organizes itself and the type of leadership necessary to participate in those changes.

5. IN SUMMARY

The governing body of an independent school is a significant participant in the life of its school. The research described in this paper set out to explore the nature of that participation. It sought to do this within an holistic paradigm. In particular, the school is viewed as a living system whose prime concern is to preserve its identity. This is achieved by structures of expectations of expectations which are stabilized temporally, socio-politically and materially, and which guide the choices that the school makes in its daily life.. A case study methodology was employed to investigate the participation of five A.H.I.S.A. schools in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney (with special reference to the school of which the writer is head). It was concluded that the governing body of such a school participates in the mechanisms which guarantee the stability of these structures. More importantly, the governing body enables the school to function at a reflexive level -- a more successful level at which to function in the face of the increased complexity and contingency of the environments in which schools must function.

Maintaining the identity of a school is not something that can be imposed from *without*, as though a school were a machine whose future states can be predicted and controlled. Maintaining an identity is something that occurs from *within* as a result of autopoietic processes. If members of governing bodies (and heads) view their schools as machines, then their efforts will be towards control and predicting the future -- a future which, in the writer's view, is inherently unpredictable. On the other hand, if governing bodies see their schools as living systems, then their efforts will be directed towards understanding their schools' autonomy and how they can participate in their evolution. A far more promising and rewarding endeavour.

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